July 20, 1967

Dr. Maurice B. Visscher
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Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455

Dear Mr. Visscher:

This is in reply to your of July 14.

To answer your request, I am enclosing a copy of the talk I gave at the ACP meeting. This will be published in a September supplement to the Annals of Internal Medicine. However, I think the main point you might be interested in was included in the informal discussion, and although I don't have a good copy of this at hand, I have incorporated the gist of it in the Washington Post columns also enclosed.

Do you have in your files a copy of a report this last year by a California State Senate committee dealing with the release of animals from pounds? This did strike me as an unusually thoughtful study, and if you don't already have a copy I will try to dig out either a copy or a reference to it.

I fully agree with every point that you made in the last paragraph of your letter to Science. I am afraid many of the abuses of bureaucratic fastidiousness are inevitable, once the profession abdicated its responsibility for the thoughtful use of new agents. I would, however, be alarmed at a possible implication of the third point of your first paragraph, namely that one might discover the clinical non-utility of a new drug by a pilot study which had not been preceded by sufficient precautions concerning possible toxicity. So everything hinges on "excessively elaborate", doesn't it?

I would be inclined to put the shoe on the other foot at a somewhat later stage in the process. We could afford to take somewhat larger risks with important new therapeutics provided we could be sure that their early use was confined to practitioneers who really knew what they were doing, and would be on careful watch for reversible side effects. I will impose on you by enclosing some additional writings on this theme.

Yours sincerely,

Joshua Lederberg
Professor of Genetics

VISSCHER